

College Libraries and the Process of Education

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The famous educationist Professor Stephen Leacock in his characteristic style has described how he would go about setting up a college. He says, "I would found first a smoking room; then when I had a little more money in hand I would found a dormitory; then after that or more probably with it a decent reading room and library. After that if I had still the money over, that I couldn't use I would hire a Professor and get some text books." These words spring up from his right understanding of the aim of education and the process and methods to be adopted for achieving that aim.

1. AIM

The true aim of education according to modern educationists, is to lead the inborn curiosity of the individual along the path of discovery so as to stimulate a sense of appreciation and understanding of basic facts of life. Once the curiosity is so aroused then the individual probes and explores the subject in his own perspective and according to his own individual ability. The purpose of institutions of higher education is to create an environment in which these pursuits of the individual becomes possible. College also as an institution of higher education should acquire and disseminate knowledge and foster free and responsible thinking. Only by discharging this function they could harness the capability of youth and take humanity onwards in its march to self knowledge and self expression. So if the teaching and learning situation can not fulfil this aim of education the resources utilized for maintaining such institutions goes waste.

2. PROCESS

To assess the worth of any educational institutions we need only evaluate the educational process that is going on there. The teaching and learning methods seen practised in higher education from very early times can be broadly classified into two. For convenience let us call them traditional and modern methods.

Traditional method of teaching and learning largely means explaining some textual materials which students are required to read, dictation of

lecture notes, simple practicals duplicating the procedures and the results already given in the science texts and memorizing all these by students. These are followed by the annual examinations in which the student is expected to reproduce a few items from memory in writing. Success in the examination here depends on luck and memory power.

In modern method of teaching and learning, education is considered a process of learning than of teaching, signifying the self efforts to be put by the students. Here the students are provided with the necessary facilities and provisions for mastering the subject matter, techniques, skills, habits of thought and method of work in their chosen field. The traditional method can not help the aim of higher education and most of the educational experts have anticipated even before the beginning of this century its futility. If an educational institution has to serve its purpose, the method of teaching and learning practised there should be a modern one. The organisation of the library and other subject departments of the college should be so as to enable this modern method of instruction where instead of acquiring knowledge merely by memorizing, the students develop a lifelong thirst for knowledge, to learn, to think, to analyse and to conclude. Above all, there will be an abiding commitment to reason and rationality.

3. HEART

The development of the library and information services in the college is also very much related to the two patterns of teaching and learning explained above. Where the traditional method is followed library service required will be a mere circulation of some text books, light reading materials and newspapers. Here no professional expertise is required for the librarians and in this teaching-learning situation library will remain an insignificant department of the college.

But in the modern method of teaching and learning the student and faculty play active roles and both need to open up wide vistas of subject with the help and guidance of librarians. Here the teacher initiates the students to the Universe of Knowledge, and it is the student who is to explore the subject. It is the library which makes their explorations possible by placing at their discretion, the intellectual records and tools that are available in the subject of their pursuit. In such situations students become aware of the various facets of subjects and current information on them and develop their own views. In this situation it becomes more difficult for the teacher to help and guide the students and clear their doubts. Here the teachers also

will need dynamic library and information services both qualitatively and quantitatively. Hence under this pattern of teaching-learning in colleges, library will become the centre of all activities. It will have a prominent role among all the departments of the college.

So to evaluate the teaching and learning methods and their effectiveness in a college, an evaluation of the library and information services, which is the life blood of all academic activities of the college, alone is sufficient. If the modern method of teaching and learning is followed in a college, a well selected competently administered adequately financed and suitably housed library will be there.

4. STATE

Let us examine against these trends of modern educational process and its information requirement the teaching, learning and its required information dissemination situation in Kerala's colleges. At present there are 215 colleges and other institutions of higher education in Kerala. Of these 55 are Government colleges and among these 10 are first grade colleges. Here we briefly evaluate the situation in these Government Colleges only. Statistical information about one First Grade College which ranks seventh among all colleges, in student and staff strength, courses offered etc. is cited. But the actual general situation is far worse than we could see from this sample.

5. SPECIMEN

The sample used for evaluating the library situation is Government College, Kasaragod. The college was started in 1957. For Four years it has only temporary accommodation. In 1961 the college was shifted to its own building which consisted functional library space which would have been sufficient for two decades of college's development.

51. BASE

For efficient functioning, like any other department of the college, library requires suitable building or halls with good ventilation, furniture and sufficient working facilities for staff. Unlike other colleges, at the initial stage this college had a stock room which could stock 15,000 volumes and a reading room and work area which could accommodate readers tables for 80 users and seats for eight library staff. By 1980 the total space available to the college was exhausted. But sanctioning of new courses continued without any consideration of the availability of sufficient space for class rooms

or library services. By 1985 there was a five time increase in the student strength and two time increase in the teacher strength. Even though there was a three time increase in the interior space available to the college it was insufficient.

COLLEGE'S THREE DECADES OF DEVELOPMENT

Academic year	Courses offered		Teachers	Students	Library staff	Genl. lib.	Books	Stock space	Reading room
	DC.	PG.			Qd. : Non-qualified	budget Rs.		sq. mts.	sq. mtr.
1962-63	4	—	45	470	0 : 1	2500	8049	145	145
1967-68	8	—	55	575	0 : 2	0000	12400	145	145
1972-73	9	1	65	1300	0 : 3	0650	17821	145	145
1982-83	12	2	93	1900	0 : 3	0000	27146	145	70
1984-85	12	4	96	2000	1 : 3	1500	31277	145	00
1986-87	12	4	102	2025	1 : 6	1000	35500	145	00
1988-89	12	4	102	2025	1 : 6	0000	35500	145	00

When library's collection and service requirements increased about twenty five times space actually available to it was reduced by half. When the reading room was taken over for other purposes, library was forced to gutter the seats of its staff and a few readers tables which can seat 15 users inside the stock room. But more than 75 students enter the library at peak hours for reading newspapers, magazines and other purposes. The resultant congestion can be imagined. Failing to get seats or reading atmosphere, students and staff go out disappointed. So library is totally removed from the lively process of education in the college.

52. Energy

A competent and well-trained professional team is essential for the library and information services that is to support teaching and learning in a college. In collaboration with the professors and lecturers of all the departments of the college, the librarian and his staff should plan for the students to pursue preparatory parallel and follow up study in each of the subjects taught in the college and mobilise the resources of the library from time to time to facilitate this pursuit. If the librarians are to fulfil these

duties their academic qualifications should be equal to that of the college teachers. But as per the existing norms in Kerala, librarians with SSLC and Certificate in library science can be promoted to any post including the Chief Librarian's post in a Post Graduate College. In our sample College's three decades of existence, for twentyfive years librarians with SSLC and Certificate only were available to it. All the college libraries in the State were managed by such underqualified staff during their first ten or twenty years due to the existing rules of grading libraries, recruitment and promotion of librarians etc. Still it is not realised that the services of a senior librarian with experience and suitable qualifications is important at the earlier stages when the foundation of the real heart of the college is laid.

For the libraries of the post graduate departments of the college as per the existing staff pattern there is provision only for a full time library attender and not a qualified librarian. The quality of library service the Post Graduate students would get need no comment. So all the college libraries lack qualified professionals to manage the services.

53. Substance

A healthy educational process will become possible in the college only if it has a sensible collection of books which are the tools of the educator. The book collection built up through the last three decades, existing in the sample is far below the standard required for a college. Two sets of encyclopaedias and some fifteen other volumes which includes dictionaries and show-case books published before 1960 were the only books that can be classified as reference books. But now their contents have become obsolete, for these titles have gone through various editions since their acquisition. None of the subject encyclopaedias are available. The regional language is Malayalam. Even though two authentic and accepted English-Malayalam dictionaries were in print for the last sixty years, the college went without one for 30 years. An Year Book like 'India-1987' or even the locally published 'Malayala Manorama Year Book' was acquired only during three years after 1959. The sample, like other colleges in Kerala lacks a proper and balanced book selection policy. Annual financial support for college libraries is also not adequate.

In any service library an organisation and assembling of documents for effective use is essential. Cataloguing and classification are the primary needs of any college library, not only for knowing the materials available but

also for locating them. But the 36000 documents in the college remains unprocessed. Some other college libraries have processed their collections. But these highly professional works of classifying and cataloguing the degree and post graduate level books were done by staff with SSLC and Certificate in Library Science. The result can be guessed.

The books which come to about 50 per cent of the total collection were kept at various departments or the college. There are no full time staff to attend library services in the departments. Lecturers who are put in charge of these collections will be available for this service only when they have no lecture classes. This system also hinders efficient organisation and the maximum utilisation of the book available in the college.

54. System

A clear cut policy of administration on all matters pertaining to the functioning of the college library is lacking. The college librarian is never consulted in the question of budget, furniture or book selection in the college, which prevents the effective use of the meagre resources available. In all the colleges a Professor is put in charge of the libraries. It kills the enthusiasm and the initiative of the professionals and also creates unnecessary technical problems.

Librarian is not a member of college council. Membership in college council is necessary for participation in shaping library policy. It is also necessary for the librarian to attend staff meetings and acquaint himself with the trends in the college if he is to render appropriate library service. These are not possible without academic status. By avoiding Librarians from the administrative councils of the college and placing a professor in charge of the library, Librarian, is denied his legitimate power to check undue interference of other departments and development of other departments at the cost of library's space and services. The physical education staff are included in college councils and hence they have such power.

6. Problem

All this shows that the teaching-learning methods and the student and faculty support services are on the whole far below the level of qualitative viability. The problem has become very complex and various factors have contributed to the present state of affairs. Colleges have sprung up without the needed physical infrastructure, library and laboratory facilities. New courses were sanctioned even if the colleges were unmanagably over-crowded

and their libraries remained without sufficient stock, working reading space, standard shelves and other furniture.

Demands of the society for larger number of colleges and various specialised courses is natural and justified. But multiplication of institutions or unscientific development of existing ones is not going to help us. The establishment of new colleges or starting of new courses can be justified only when competent men and physical facilities for the purposes are available. Our aim should be to improve our existing institutions as much as we can, raising them to adequate accepted standards taking care to establish new one only after we had satisfied ourselves that resources for them become available.

7. REMEDY

The total higher education system is in chaos. Colleges are part of the system. Library is only one of the many organs of the college which facilitates the educational process in that institution and its existence and functioning is related to other organs. If any particular organ becomes diseased the total system will start malfunctioning. If the system becomes defective all organs will start underfunctioning or non-functioning. Here the teaching-learning methods followed are obsolete. This does not require the library and information services. So the cause of the underfunctioning of the college libraries is the defective teaching-learning methods. The responsibility of innovating new teaching and learning methods rests with the other organs of the college and not with the library. George S Bonn who has been in India many a times as a visiting Professor remarked, "As long as class room lecture and providing outdated notes remain as the main method of teaching, the scope of college libraries in India is very limited". Kerala is very familiar with this type of teaching and it is unabatedly practised in our class rooms from bottom to the top. Unless teaching is to be oriented in Graduate and Post Graduate levels learning will be one sided mechanical and limited to the purpose of examination only. This traditional type of teaching-learning method is the real obstacle to develop a library culture which is essential for accelerating the reading habits of the college community. When the colleges change over to the modern method of education the process of education will not be limited within the four walls of the class room or laboratory. Then library will become the important place of study and investigation and will be treated as the most essential non human factor which is closely related

to the process of education in the college. So actually, it is not the college library but the teaching departments surrounding it that requires reforms. When they start functioning properly college libraries will be pressurized and they will automatically get vitalized to disseminate the knowledge required for the educational process.

8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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